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COMBAT IN VIENNA

(29 Mar-16 Apr 1945)

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COMBAT IN VIENNA
(29 Mar-16 Apr 1945)

by

General der Infanterie a.D. Rudolf von Buenu

Historical Division
HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES ARMY, EUROPE

C O N T E N T S

	<u>Page</u>
I. BACKGROUND	1
1. The Command	1
2. The Assignment	2
3. Estimate of the Situation, 3 April 1945	3
II. COMBAT ACTIONS	6
1. Plans and Orders	6
2. Measures Related to Combat Command	8
3. The Fighting in Detail	9
III. COMMENTS	27
1. General	27
2. Critical Moments	30
3. Final Comment	32
APPENDIXES:	
A. List of Units	33
B. Evaluation of Troops	36
ILLUSTRATIONS	
Sketch 1 -- Overlay Showing Successive Withdrawals	
Sketch 2 -- Overlay Showing General Situation	
Sketch 3 -- The Fighting On the Extreme Right	
Wing (8-14 April)	

COMBAT IN VIENNA

(29 March-16 April 1945)

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Command. During the defense of Vienna the defenders were technically under the command of the Commander of Defense Area, Vienna.

In theory, the following units were subordinate: All units and commands of the Replacement Army stationed in the defense area which had not yet been shifted or were in process of being shifted west; all units of the field forces withdrawing to the defense area; all air force units detailed for ground fighting; the police, the military units of the "Party" (organized in the Volkssturm), and the civilian administrative agencies of the city.

In practice and probably because of the rapid course of events, no clear regulations about the extent of command were issued by higher authorities, so that only the following units were subordinate: the remaining commands and units of the Reserve Army; air force units detailed for ground fighting;

some elements of the police force; the Volksturm, and for a short time the civilian administrative agencies of the town. During the entire battle of Vienna, troops of the field forces were subordinated for one day only, 13 April 1945. At all other times they remained under the command of the II SS Panzer Corps.

On 7 April 1945, I, as combat commander, with my staff, was likewise placed under the command of that corps and thereupon my combat command function practically ceased. Moreover, my authority was limited by the necessity of obtaining the agreement of Reich Defense Commissioner von Schirach for every important measure. I had nothing to do with ARLZ measures (general regulations concerning demolitions); I could spare neither materiel nor forces for such measures.

2. The Assignment. Except for the telephone order from the Wehrmacht High Command, Army Personnel Department, which appointed me Commander of Defense Area, Vienna, neither General Headquarters nor any other superior headquarters issued a verbal or written order concerning the defense of Vienna. Measures undertaken by me as combat commander, therefore, were framed for the situation as I found it and for its probable course, within the scope of my assigned defense duties. They were also guided by general orders issued to combat commanders by the Wehrmacht or Army High Command.

3. Estimate of the Situation, 3 April 1945. On 31 March Russian troops had penetrated the frontier fortifications south of Lake Neusiedler and had therefore been able on 1 April to open the Sorpon (Oedenburg) defile from the south and west. On 3 April they took Wiener Neustadt, blocked the Semmering Pass railroad line near Gloggnitz and took Fort Pressburg (Bratislava). During the night of 3 April, enemy spearheads were fighting against German reserve and alert units (4th and 33d Training Battalions) south of Moedling and in the vicinity of Laxenburg. On 4 April the enemy penetrated the frontier fortifications between Lake Neusiedler and the Danube River, attacked Bruck on the Leitha River and, advancing simultaneously from south and north, occupied it on 5 April.

The enemy now had three choices:

The first, most probable, and politically advisable, was to gain speedy possession of Vienna as the capital of a country which was to be restored to "freedom."

The second was to advance on one or both sides of the Danube (passing south and north of Vienna and avoiding the city) and push on in the general direction Krems (bridges) Linz.

Finally, he could combine both courses of action, since he probably was strong enough to do so. He had at his disposal, as we found out later, one armored, one motorized,

one mechanized, and one infantry army. In addition he was assisted by an air force which had absolute command of the air and probably by forces of the Austrian resistance movement, which we also learned about later. At the time we did not have a clear picture of the strength of the enemy and of the number and type of his units but we had the general impression that the enemy was far superior both in personnel and materiel.

German forces (Sixth SS Panzer Army), which had withdrawn from Hungary to the frontier fortifications on both sides of Lake Neusiedler, had not been able to establish themselves in the prepared positions south of the lake, since these positions had already been overrun by the enemy. Hence they had to retreat to the Vienna Woods and to the Leitha River. North of Lake Neusiedler several experienced, though exhausted, Eastern front divisions were occupying positions which they succeeded in holding for a few days.

Because of their poor combat efficiency, the alert replacement units which had been moved to the front by order of the commander of the Replacement Army to reinforce the line, were not able to offer much resistance. Some did not even reach the position, but were surprised by the enemy, south of Lake Neusiedler, while detraining or moving up.

The combat efficiency of the replacement units and the Volksturm still in Vienna was in general poor, because they

were numerically weak and for the most part insufficiently armed and equipped.

The Luftwaffe antiaircraft units detailed for ground fighting in and around Vienna (24th Antiaircraft Division) could be expected to provide some defense. On the other hand, assistance from air force units was unlikely. (As it turned out, not a single German plane was in the air during the entire battle for Vienna.) Supply troops had not been provided. In short, no preparations whatever had been made for the defense of the city.

Nevertheless an attack against Vienna by strong Russian forces was to be expected within a few days. Our only hope was that some German divisions from the field would become available for the battle. Since the numerical strength of such divisions, if any, had probably been greatly reduced in Hungary, the idea of a successful or even prolonged defense of Vienna had to be rejected from the beginning, and measures taken accordingly. Reich Defense Commissioner von Schirach, the Commander in Chief of the Sixth SS Panzer Army, SS Oberstgruppenfuehrer Dietrich, and I agreed about this at our first meeting 4 April, 1945. And again at a later date, when it was proposed to make a corresponding report to the High Command in the hope that the intention of defending the city might be abandoned and the battle avoided. As late as 2 April, after

the loss of the frontier fortifications which up to that time had generally and correctly been considered the only possible line of defense for Vienna, the order was given to defend the city and, in the end, I indorsed it, in spite of the clearly unfavorable situation. The decision had been made because of the following considerations:

1. The early occupation of Austria's capital by the Russians, with its incalculable political consequences, must be prevented or, at least, delayed.

2. The defense of the city would engage strong enemy forces if the Russians decided to first attack Vienna. In this case, it was hoped, we could gain time for consolidating the front.

The decision for or against fighting was not mine to make. All I had to do was to concentrate on gaining as much time as possible and building up our defense.

II. COMBAT ACTIONS

1. Plans and Orders.

- a. Measures to Strengthen the Defense. Formation of alert battalions and alert artillery units, consisting of replacement training and recruit units of the Vienna garrison, soldiers on leave and stragglers from the field forces.

- b. Collection of Arms, Ammunition, and Equipment From Depots in Vienna and Vicinity. Because of the tactical

situation and general confusion, this measure met with many difficulties, which sometimes were not worth the effort. In some cases these difficulties may have been intentionally aggravated by members of the Austrian resistance movement.

c. Bringing in of Reinforcements (alert units of Military District XVII). Two light and two heavy batteries from Wels and one antitank company from Freistadt were expected, but only the antitank company and one light battery arrived. These units were placed under the command of the 6th Panzer Division for technical reasons.

d. Formation of Transport Columns. This was done through the rounding up of all motor vehicles still in Vienna. This project did not get underway smoothly.

e. Requisitioning of Officers and NCOs for the Alert Units. On 7 April two battalion commanders arrived from the Officer Replacement pool in the Doellersheim training area, and 100 cadets were detached from the reserve officers training courses at Znojmo (Znaim). The majority of the latter were detailed to the 6th Panzer Division, some to the 2d SS Panzer Division, and others to my staff as administrative officers.

f. Organization of a Working Staff for my Headquarters. This met with considerable difficulty. Beside a few command and administrative officers and myself only the staff of

Military Headquarters Vienna was available. This staff consisted chiefly of officers with little battle experience and combat initiative. Some were too old and, as it turned out later, some were inclined to cooperate with the resistance movement.

g. Organization of a Quasi-military Government Over the City's Public Services and Agencies. Because of the rapid and unfavorable development of the tactical situation, this project did not reach fulfillment. I could only instruct the civil authorities to keep working as long as possible and charge them to do their best to help the populace during the fighting and keep vitally important industries going at all cost.

2. Measures Related to Combat Command.

a. I requested that the field divisions in the Vienna area be placed under my command, for centralization of authority. This request was rejected but contact with these units was established and continuously maintained.

b. Commitment of alert units, after reconnaissance by bicycle and motorized scout squads, for blocking and defensive missions on the main enemy approach roads.

c. Commitment of bicycle mounted antitank detachments to attack tanks which had broken through.

d. Protection of the Danube Canal and River bridges against sudden enemy seizure.

e. Employment of engineer alert units for blocking arterial roads leading to the city. Some of the engineer alert units were placed under the army group engineers, (127th GHQ Engineer Brigade), whose task it was to prepare for the demolition of the bridges over the Danube Canal and River. Railroad engineer alert units were placed under the command of the army group railroad engineer regiment and directed to prepare for the demolition of railroads.

f. Command was exercised almost exclusively through special-missions staff officers and messengers, since only a small and technically inadequate alert signal company was at my disposal. For most of the time, liaison with higher commands and adjacent units had to be established in person or through local telephone or radio service.

3. The Fighting in Detail.

a. Vienna Declared a Defense Area (29 March-2 April). On 29 March 1945 Russian troops captured Koeszeg (Guens). Therefore German antitank units from the Cadet Academy at Wiener Neustadt, in approximately battalion strength, blocked the roads leading over the Rosalien Mountains and through the Pitten Valley northwest to Gloggnitz, Neunkirchen, and Wiener Neustadt. On 30 March the enemy, advancing from Koeszeg,

penetrated the Rosalien Mountains and overran, with tanks, the alert units attached to Military District XVII as they were about to occupy the frontier fortifications. Russian tanks and infantry then attacked German blocking units at the road defile south of Mattersburg. The engagement continued through 31 March. On 1 April the enemy succeeded in penetrating this defile and captured Mattersburg. Severe fighting on the hills northwest and north of Mattersburg followed. On 31 March, a fight for the defile southeast of Sopron (Oedenburg) near Nagycenk and Kophaza had taken place. Since a frontal attack brought no success, the enemy turned west via Deutschkreuz and Neckenmarkt, and captured Sopron on 1 April.

In the course of a further enemy penetration on 31 March and 1 April, through the Rosalien Mountains northwest towards Wiener Neustadt, two other battalions of the Wiener Neustadt Cadet Academy, though equipped only with small arms and a few machine guns and Panzerfaeste, initially frustrated enemy attempts to debouch from the mountains between Erlach and Frohsdorf. In these engagements the cadets destroyed about 30 tanks.

On 2 April, while fighting continued in this area, the course of events in the Mattersburg--Sopron area led to an enemy penetration in the direction of Ebenfurth. German forces were now compelled to withdraw to Wiener Neustadt and the

Leitha River and during the night of 2 April to give up Wiener Neustadt. On the same day the enemy advanced via Edlitz towards Gloggnitz. Also on 2 April the High Command declared Vienna to be a defense area.

b. Withdrawal to Mariabrunn--Mauer--Liesing--Enzersdorf--Moedling--Wendorn--Himberg (3-4 April). On 3 April the enemy advanced northward from the line Wiener Neustadt--Ebenfurth. This advance led to the first engagements with forward reconnaissance detachments to the south and with parts of the alert units of the 4th and 33d Panzer Replacement and Training Battalions stationed approximately on a line from Guntramsdorf to Laxenburg. Farther east the enemy captured Eisenstadt, and north of the Danube he captured Bratislava (Pressburg).

On the evening of 3 April, having been appointed combat commander of Defense Area, Vienna by order of the Wehrmacht High Command, I arrived in Vienna and took over the command from the former commander of the city, Lt.Gen. Maerker, who was still present, and from Maj.Gen. Koelitz, who had been provisional combat commander. His command post was the Vienna military headquarters on Universitaetsstrasse.

Because of the danger impending in the south, the 2d SS Panzer Division ("Das Reich") was committed in the position between Guntramsdorf and Laxenburg, which up to that time had

been occupied by parts of the 4th and 3d Panzer Replacement and Training Battalions. The division now absorbed these battalions. Security forces were advanced to Guntramsdorf and Muenchendorf. However, the continuous pressure of greatly superior enemy forces moving up from the south, penetrations of frontier fortifications between Lake Neusiedler and the Danube River, the loss of Bruck on the Leitha River on 4 April, made the withdrawal of the 2d SS Panzer Division to the line Moedling--Neudorf--Himberg inevitable and led to severe fighting on that line as well as in the vicinity of Rauchenwarth. An envelopment attempted by Russian troops west of Moedling on the afternoon of 4 April was evaded. On this day I had my first conference with Reich Defense Commissioner von Schirach and on the same or the following day a conference with the military and civilian authorities who had remained in Vienna. At this time the measures listed in sections II, 1, a and II, 1, b were inaugurated. According to instructions, Military District Headquarters XVII moved to Duernstein near Krems (later Freistadt, Upper Austria).

During the night of 4 April stronger enemy forces advanced from the south through the Vienna Woods in the direction of Pressbaum on the western railroad line. A police battalion, with one police tank, in position on both sides of the Pressbaum road to protect this important line of communication was

cut in half. The battalion, nevertheless, was able to maintain a rear guard resistance. During the night it was withdrawn to Huettendorf. There it joined an eager, fighting, Hitler Youth battalion,¹ which had been committed meantime at full strength and some alert units of lesser combat efficiency. However, the German communications and supply line to and from the west was now cut south of the Danube River.

Because of these developments and the enemy's attempt at envelopment near Moedling, during the night of 4 April the position of the 2d SS Panzer Division was extended from Moedling northwest and north to the vicinity of the western railroad line. This extension was manned by cavalry units of the 11th Reconnaissance Replacement Training Battalion and one company of the 80th Engineer Replacement and Training Battalion. In matters affecting command these elements were placed under the 2d SS Panzer Division and were employed by that division for reconnaissance and blocking. The extension of the position was for security purposes, for by 5 April the enemy was feeling his way forward on both sides of the western railroad line towards Vienna. We were able at first to hold the position north of this line, but south of it a threatened enemy envelopment of the 2d SS Panzer Division led to another withdrawal

¹Battalions of "Hitler Youth" were organized within the framework of the Volksturm.

and to the abandonment of Moedling. Fighting developed in the vicinity of Enzersdorf.

The enemy now pushed farther north between Moedling and Schwechat toward the Schwechat and Liesing Rivers. To meet this threat, alert and police units were committed on the northern bank of the Liesing, especially on Laaer Mountain. Antiaircraft batteries took part in this action, for the first time, to delay the enemy's advance.

Ever growing enemy pressure against the Vienna front from several sides necessitated further withdrawal of the 2d SS Panzer Division and adjoining units to the Mauer--Liesing--Enzersdorf line during the night of 5 April. Probably influenced by this withdrawal, the alert and police units committed on the Laaer Mountain evacuated their positions unnecessarily and on their own authority. On the left or eastern flank the 3d SS Panzer Division and the 6th Panzer Division were still withdrawing toward and across the Schwechat River, taking along with them the remnants of the security detachments from Military Headquarters Vienna which had been stationed in the Schwechat area. Russian armored spearheads invaded the "Favoriten" borough of Vienna. Concentration of stronger enemy forces in the vicinity of Rothneusiedl and Kledering indicated the imminence of a drive in that area.

c. Withdrawal To Edge of City. On 6 April the eastward advance of tank-supported enemy troops of unknown strength, north of the western railroad line, was halted temporarily by a vigorous counterattack of the Hitler Youth battalion from the vicinity of Huettendorf toward Mariabrunn. The counterattack recovered ground even beyond Mariabrunn and threw a Russian battalion back. In the afternoon, however, this sector had to be abandoned and the Hitler Youth battalion, facing southwest, was given the task of protecting the withdrawal from hill positions north of Huettendorf until noon of 7 April. In the south the 2d SS Panzer Division stopped for a short time strong enemy forces that had been advancing with tanks on the Wiental road and south thereof toward Hietzing.

At nightfall and during the night of 6 April, however, the division had to withdraw to the outskirts of Vienna. Its right flank was in the vicinity of Hietzinger Hauptplatz and its left in contact with the 3d SS Panzer Division near the Rossmarkt. On 6 April, this division had to resist strong enemy forces, in the southeastern part of the city, attacking from Rothneusiedl and in an eastern direction over the Laaer Mountain. These Russians were finally stopped on both sides of Suedtirolerplatz. Severe fighting took place for the southeast railroad station and for the arsenal grounds. The advance of enemy forces from the vicinity of Kledering northwest and

north through the Zentralfriedhof (cemetery) toward the Simmering-Danube Canal made it necessary to commit the advance elements of the Fuehrer Grenadier Division on the terrain east of the arsenal just as they were arriving in Vienna. The 6th Panzer Division also was committed at once on the island between the Danube Canal and River. The leading artillery batteries of the Fuehrer Grenadier Division took up positions in the Prater. But during the evening the arsenal grounds had to be surrendered. At the same time, the southernmost railroad bridges over the Danube Canal and River were blown up.

d. The Fighting Inside the City, 1-8 April. During the night of 6 April Russian armored spearheads cautiously moved forward toward the west railroad station although Hitler Youth antitank detachments were employed against them with considerable success. The fighting near Hietzinger Hauptplatz, Suedtiroler Platz, and the southeast railroad station lasted all night.

On 7 April the enemy reached the Danube River northwest of Vienna. Fighting ensued near Klosterneuburg, where the 80th Engineer Replacement and Training Battalion was committed. During the night of 6 April two 75-mm antitank guns of the antitank alert company, which had arrived from Freistadt, were set up at the exit from the city toward Klosterneuburg, and two others on the opposite bank of the Danube.

Three heavy (75-mm) antiaircraft guns were placed in position on the Guertel (belt line), near the west railroad station, to reinforce antitank defense. However, the advance of superior enemy forces toward that station forced the 2d SS Panzer Division to withdraw, fighting, to the Guertel and abandon the station. During this action contact with the right (north) flank, where the situation was doubtful, was interrupted for some time, but contact with the 3d SS Panzer Division on the left was maintained. After severe fighting and in spite of determined resistance, this division finally had to abandon the southeast railroad station to the enemy.

The enemy likewise gained ground, although slowly, against the 6th Panzer Division on the Prater. The fighting there was especially severe.

On the same day strong Russian forces crossed the Danube in a northwesterly direction above Hainburg and the March River in a westerly direction north of Hainburg.

On the afternoon of 7 April, by order of the Sixth SS Panzer Army, I was placed under the II SS Panzer Corps. Thus after three days my duties as combat commander had in practice come to an end. My subsequent assignment was as regional commander of the northern half of the town. My position was similar to that of a division commander, although I retained the title of combat commander.

During the night of 7 April stronger elements of the Fuehrer Grenadier Division came into the city and were deployed for the purpose of regaining the west railroad station. But the enemy was also observed to be assembling stronger forces near that station. Further north, the Hitler Youth battalion, ably led and bravely fighting, completed its covering assignment in the vicinity of Huettendorf, disengaged itself from the enemy according to instructions, and took up new positions in the Hohe Warte area. It was reinforced by three 75-mm antiaircraft guns withdrawn from the vicinity of the west station and placed under its command.

On 8 April the battle of Vienna gained momentum on the whole front, from the northern part of the city through the Kahlenberg, the Guertel, the arsenal grounds to the Prater. Russian tank attacks on the road from Klosterneuburg along the banks of the Danube were halted. (Two tanks were put out of action by the two 75-mm antitank guns.) However, the Kahlenberg, occupied by an air force alert battalion of poor combat efficiency, was lost.

Strong enemy forces attempting to advance east and northeast along the Alserstrasse were attacked on their southern flank by a panzer infantry regiment from the Fuehrer Grenadier Division. The regiment was advancing to retake the west railroad station but, seeing the Russian forces, turned north and

stopped them. Major General Wessely, killed later in the vicinity of Mannhardsbrunn, gathered the alert units still available into the Rossau barracks and set up a makeshift defensive line running in the general direction Friedensbruecke--University--Rathaus, and thus preserved a certain continuity on this front. However, the attempt to close the gap in the left wing of the Hitler Youth battalion north of the Friedensbruecke was unsuccessful.

The rest of the front held.

Reconnaissance operations were carried out against enemy forces which had crossed the March and Danube Rivers on both sides of Hainburg. My command post was moved from the Vienna Military Headquarters Building to the Deputy Corps Headquarters of the XVII Corps at Stubenring 1.

e. Withdrawal Across Danube Canal, Abandonment of City (9-10 April). During the following night and the next day, 9 April, the fighting continued with increasing violence along the entire front. The Hitler Youth battalion had firmly established its all-around defensive position from Nussdorfer Spitz on the Danube Canal, through Grinzinger Allee and Silbergasse, to the Danube Canal north of the Friedensbruecke and around the Hohe Warte. In the morning enemy armored reconnaissance patrols probing this position were turned back. Likewise a later enemy attack launched against the same position from

north and northwest was repulsed with high casualties. Meanwhile, on the east bank of the Danube Canal, between Nussdorfer Spitz and the Friedensbruecke, an alert battalion was stationed to give tactical support and possibly assist the withdrawal of the Hitler Youth battalion. This was the only case in which reserves were employed according to plan.

Almost simultaneously with the attack on the Hitler Youth battalion other enemy forces farther south, advanced southward and in the early afternoon took possession of the Franz Joseph Railroad Station and joined up there with units advancing from the west.

In the late afternoon the front line of the Hitler Youth battalion was vigorously attacked from the north, west, and south. After initial resistance, the battalion had to be withdrawn across the Danube during the night, to avoid annihilation at the hands of greatly superior forces.

The withdrawal was carried out in good order and, as before, without major casualties. The enemy, however, following on the battalion's northeast flank, gained a foothold on the canal lock near Nussdorfer Spitz. Valiant attempts to dislodge the enemy from the lock failed. On the other hand, the continued attempts of the enemy, on 9 and 10 April, to cross over to the island between the Danube Canal and River--probably in order to push on to the Florisdorfer Bridge--were beaten

back and many casualties were inflicted. On 9 April the northwest railroad bridge was blown up because of the imminent danger that it might fall intact into the enemy's hands. On the same day the northern railroad bridge was likewise demolished. It was no longer useful to us and would have had to be destroyed sooner or later anyway. Moreover, the engineer units committed there without possibility of reinforcement were urgently needed elsewhere.

The unfavorable development of the tactical situation all along the Vienna front, the continuous dwindling of the German troops in the face of growing enemy forces, and above all the appearance of enemy troops on the north bank of the Danube, called for new decisions and measures, notwithstanding the valiant efforts of the three field divisions still fighting west of the Danube Canal and the 6th Panzer Division at the Prater. On the evening of 9 April, therefore, II SS Panzer Corps Headquarters ordered the abandonment of the center of the city and a withdrawal across the Danube Canal during the night.

I also directed the demolition of the Danube Canal bridges in order that forces could be disengaged to fight against enemy troops advancing westward along the north bank of the river. These forces had already clashed with the elements of the Fuehrer Grenadier Division that had been advanced southeast on

9 April to the neighborhood of Gross Enzersdorf and farther north. So these and other German units still committed on that side of the Danube River were withdrawn across the Canal in good order and without much interference by the enemy, during the night of 9 April. All bridges were destroyed. My staff and I were the last to cross the Aspern Bridge at 0300 on 10 April. The Fuehrer Grenadier Division was redeployed against the enemy advancing in northwesterly direction along the northern bank of the Danube. On the east bank of the Danube Canal a new continuous front line was formed and direct contact with the 6th Panzer Division was reestablished. Upon establishing contact with the II SS Panzer Corps I was relieved of my duties and ordered to the Corps command post at Bisamberg for reassignment.

After the Russians had discovered our retreat, they reconnoitered our new forward line, and moved up to it. They resumed fighting at once with full vigor, against the positions of the II SS Panzer Corps. The 2d and 3d SS Panzer Divisions were established on the east bank of the Danube Canal and the 6th Panzer Division was in the Prater district.

f. Withdrawal to Danube North Bank (10-13 April). The fighting north of the Danube likewise grew increasingly severe. The enemy advanced slowly but steadily in a northwesterly direction.

During the evening of 10 April the Hitler Youth battalion was withdrawn to the north bank of the Danube and then to Flandorf, north of Bisamberg, to be at the disposal of the II SS Panzer Corps.

During the two following days a superior enemy succeeded in crossing the Danube Canal at some points, gained ground in the Prater district against the decimated 6th Panzer Division, and reduced the front line of the 3d Panzer Division to a shallow bridgehead around the Florisdorfer and Reich Bridges.

On 12 April at 2315 I was ordered by II SS Panzer Corps Headquarters at Bisamberg to take over the command of the bridgehead and to hold it. I established contact with the three panzer divisions, whose fighting power had meanwhile been further reduced, and dispatched officers by motor vehicle to obtain information about their exact situation. With a small staff I then crossed the Danube to the command post of the 2d SS Panzer Division in the Dresdener Strasse and at 0400 on 13 April took command of the bridgehead.

The situation was as follows: On the right bank of the Danube only remnants of the 2d SS Panzer Division were left. They occupied a bridgehead from the Florisdorfer Bridge up to and including the northwest railroad station, with their flank exposed at that point. The remnants of the 3d and 6th SS Panzer Divisions had retreated across the Danube during the

night of 12 April. The Reich Bridge was intact but under fire from enemy infantry heavy weapons on the right bank of the Danube. On the left flank it was securely guarded by German forces.

It was clear that the situation had changed basically since the issuance of the order from Bisamberg. Therefore, changing the plan on my own authority, and reporting the change to the II SS Panzer Corps, I decided to withdraw my troops across the river, but to hold the reduced bridgehead until nightfall. Crossing the Danube by day would have entailed high casualties because the Florisdorfer Bridge was under enemy fire.

Fighting became incredibly severe. German troops, practically out of ammunition, suffered almost continuous enemy fire from all types of weapons. T-34 tanks were employed against them on all streets leading to Pater Abel Platz, and even on the railroad tracks along the Danube. The small number of soldiers occupying the bridgehead resisted unflinchingly for many hours but suffered high casualties.

A strong Russian attack launched in the morning from the Reich Bridge toward the Florisdorfer Bridge and against the exposed left wing of the 2d SS Panzer Division nearly crushed and rolled up the entire bridgehead. The situation was saved by withdrawing the front line some 100 meters and by anchoring the left flank on the Danube River, but by evening the bridgehead

was narrowed to a semicircle of about 200 meters radius around the Pater Abel Platz.

At nightfall the withdrawal to the north bank of the Danube began in accordance with instructions. First all the wounded were taken to the rear; then the whole bridgehead was vacated. At 2400 the Florisdorfer Bridge was demolished. The enemy did not interfere. Why the Russians did not react with more energy is incomprehensible, for they could easily have annihilated the forces holding the bridgehead and captured the bridge probably undamaged.

The commander of the 2d SS Panzer Division, SS Colonel Lehmann, was wounded during these engagements on the afternoon of 13 April. My command post was at first in the same area as that of this division. Later, headquarters were again established together at Dresdener Strasse near the southwestern ramp of the Florisdorfer Bridge. During all of this period, I observed the fighting, often at close range, and in the first line during the final battle for the Florisdorfer bridgehead.

The Reich Bridge was not demolished, but the enemy made no attempt to pursue us there.

g. Withdrawal to Leobendorf--Tresdorf--Mannhardsbrunn (14-15 April). Covering parties had been posted on the left bank of the Danube, to insure the eventual withdrawal of units fighting on the right bank. On 14 April these covering parties

were reinforced, particularly opposite the Reich Bridge which under heavy fire, could not now be destroyed. I first assumed command of the covering parties, but during the day, I was instructed to relinquish this authority and place myself again at the disposal of the II SS Panzer Corps.

Meanwhile strong Russian forces had pushed forward along the northern bank of the Danube and were approaching the suburbs of Vienna on that side. This approach led to severe fighting, especially in the Lobau sector held by the Fuehrer Grenadier Division, and to the north. On 14 April the enemy unexpectedly crossed the Danube north of Klosterneuburg and succeeded in effecting a deep penetration toward Koenigsbrunn. Some enemy forces turned from Seiring toward Gerasdorf. It now was impossible to hold the German front north of the Danube bank, which ran approximately along the line Stadlau--Kagran--Leopoldau--Stammersdorf--Hagelbrunn, and to the north thereof. During the night of 14 April therefore this front line was withdrawn to a new position, Leobendorf--Tresdorf--Mannhardsbrunn, north of Karnenburg. Large quantities of materiel, especially artillery, were lost during this action. Nevertheless, the new front was established.

h. Dissolution of Staff (16 April). The command post of the II SS Panzer Corps was at first located at Ober-Rohrbach; later it was moved to Unter-Sierndorf. My attachment to the

II SS Panzer Corps was terminated on the evening of 14 April. On 15 April my staff at Roselfeld was dissolved. On 16 April I went to my new command post at Schloss Schallaburg, near Melk, with a reduced staff, and assumed new duties as commanding general of the St. Poelten sector, where I remained until the capitulation to American forces.

III. COMMENTS

1. General.

a. During the whole battle of Vienna the enemy continuously employed a large number of fighter planes which attacked division artillery batteries in position on the left bank of the Danube, strafed our forces, especially the 6th Panzer Division, in the Prater area, and disrupted the traffic across the bridges during the day. Although these attacks did not effect severe losses in personnel, they did seriously impede our freedom of movement. They also caused great havoc in the city, which suffered much more from enemy air raids than from the actual fighting in the streets--except possibly at such focal points as the railroad stations, the Prater, the district between the Danube Canal and River, and the Peter Abel Platz. Moreover, these areas suffered more from enemy fire than from ours, curtailed as it was by shortage of ammunition. The enemy air force had complete command of the air over the battle area, with no opposition from us.

b. The Russians carried out their land attacks systematically: first, armored reconnaissance with mounted infantry, then an assault by tanks and infantry with heavy weapons, especially trench mortars, in support. When they encountered resistance they usually stopped or withheld their attack temporarily and tried to reach their goal from another direction. Typical of this method were their tactics designed for accomplishing large or small-scale envelopments (the advance through the Vienna Woods, bypassing Vienna to the west, and the attempted envelopment near Moedling). Also typical was their customary infiltration through woods or built-up areas. The area west of Vienna, and especially the city itself, offered excellent opportunities for these tactics. The Russians repeatedly demonstrated their skill in this procedure. It could have been coped with by strong, experienced infantry units, but such units were not at our disposal.

c. The performance of the hostile artillery did not in general exceed the normal expectation for such supporting fire. Stronger Russian fire concentrations were evident at the focal points and especially during the fighting for the island between the Danube Canal and River. In this area even multiple rocket guns of large caliber were used. Occasionally there were sudden concentrations of fire on the center of the city, in the area around the Parliament Building, the Hofburg,

and the Military District Headquarters. Reinforcing artillery (corps, army, or GHQ artillery) apparently was not employed. The general impression was that of a methodical and relatively slow, sometimes even hesitant, attack. This was surprising in view of the great superiority of the enemy, in numbers and material. This deliberate, cautious offensive was all the more inexplicable in view of the enemy's undoubted knowledge of our weakness.

. The extent to which the Russian tactics of sparing their forces may have been due to expected aid from the Austrian resistance movement is not known. The loss of Vienna was inevitable. Even the length of the battle, providing that no considerable reinforcements of fresh troops could be brought up, could be predicted and calculated through a comparison of the strength of the opposing forces in the light of the tactical situation, without special allowance for the Austrian resistance movement. However, it is not only possible, but probable, that the enemy was directed occasionally by inhabitants of the city and perhaps even by guides who were adherents of the resistance movement.

d. The configuration of the terrain and the presence of wooded areas made observation difficult except toward the east and southeast. It was even more difficult inside the city. This difficulty faced by us gave the enemy covered routes of approach, especially through infiltration.

However, at the same time it helped conceal the numerical weakness of our forces and favored reconnaissance and minor combat actions. The terrain did not facilitate either side's observation for heavy infantry weapons and artillery. On the other hand the terrain south and southeast of the city was rather open and level. Outside the city we had the best opportunity for observation.

2. Critical Moments. These were the most critical moments during the fighting:

a. The advance of the Russians through the Vienna Woods toward the north, in the direction of Pressbaum, during the night of 4 April and their turning movement eastward toward Vienna. Northward and along the western railroad line, a main route of approach from the west, was one of the weakest sectors in our entire front line. Except for the Hitler Youth battalion, only units of poor combat efficiency were available for that sector. The point of junction with the 2d SS Panzer Division on the left (south) flank was situated there. Therefore the danger that the sudden enemy advance toward the east into the city would penetrate to the Danube Canal and Danube bridges was very great. It was averted by commitment of the Hitler Youth battalion and some alert units.

b. The Russian advance on 8 April northeast and eastward along the Alserstrasse. At first no defense forces

were available. The enemy could therefore have occupied the Danube Canal bridges near the Rossauer Barracks easily. This danger was averted by a northward shift of the panzer grenadier regiment of the Fuehrer Grenadier Division, which had been advancing south of the Alserstrasse toward the west in order to take the west railroad station. This regiment stopped the enemy advance. We were also able to establish a makeshift blocking and security line between the Frieden Bridge and the Rathaus, but not to extend it to the left flank of the Hitler Youth battalion stationed north of the bridge.

c. The Russian advance from the vicinity of the Reich Bridge toward the Florisdorfer Bridge on the morning of 13 April. This advance might easily have crushed the left flank of the 2d SS Panzer Division near the northwest railroad station and probably have caused withdrawal of the division's entire front line, the annihilation of the division itself, and the capture of the Florisdorfer Bridge intact. The situation was restored temporarily by withdrawing the front line to a reduced bridgehead of about 700 meters radius around the Florisdorfer Bridge, though it remained endangered until the retreat across the Danube that night.

d. The unexpected crossing of the Danube by the enemy near Klosterneuburg on 14 April 1945 and the loss of Korneuburg, together with the deep penetration from the east

toward Koenigsbrunn. These events might have led to the annihilation of the front held by the II SS Panzer Corps, extending in the general direction Stadlau--Kagran--Leopoldau--Stammersdorf--Hagelbrunn, if it had not been possible to disengage the corps from the enemy during the night of 14 April. The disengagement was accomplished with great loss of materiel, and the front was reestablished on a line running approximately north of Korneuburg--Mannhardsbrunn.

3. Final Comment. The course of events during the battle of Vienna proved the correctness of the original estimate of the situation. I did not have the authority to decide whether the battle of Vienna should or should not take place. When the battle was ordered, the only possibility, for command and troops, was wholehearted fighting. Commendation is due to the field division and the Hitler Youth battalion; in the case of other units commendation must be qualified or even denied altogether.

Seen as a whole, the battle of Vienna was regrettable from a human point of view, however, it tied down very strong Russian forces, and made the establishment of a new front line south of the Danube possible. It also made possible, under enormous difficulties, the evacuation of some 9000 wounded from the battle area and their removal westward.

APPENDIX A

List of units

Designation	Name of commanders	Time
A. <u>Superior authorities</u>	Commander in Chief	Afternoon of
1) 6th SS Armored Army	Oberstgruppenfuehrer	3 April to
2) Headquarters 2d SS	Dietrich	afternoon of
Armored Corps Head-	Commanding General	7 April
quarters	Oberstgruppenfuehrer	afternoon of
	Bittrich	7 April to
		evening of
		14 April
B. <u>Subordinate authorities and units:</u>		
1) <u>Combat troops:</u>		
Alert units of the re-		
placement and training		
units of garrison		
Greater Vienna and Mili-		
tary District XVII		
Alert units consisting	Names have been	
of soldiers on leave,	forgotten	
convalescents, and		
stragglers from field		
forces		
Navy alert units		4 April to
Air Force alert units,		afternoon of
including antiaircraft		7 April, some
units		to morning of
		10 April

List of units (Cont'd)

Designation	Name of commanders	Time
Antiaircraft units of the 24th Antiaircraft Division, detailed for ground fighting	Commander: Maj. Gen. Grieshammer	
Police alert units		
Units of the local Volkssturm consisting partly of organizations of the Party (political leaders, National Socialist Motor Corps, Hitler Youth)	Names forgotten	
2) <u>Signal troops</u> see Appendix B		
3) <u>Security police troops:</u> Wehrmacht Patrol Service Vienna Constabulary	Commander: Maj Biedermann Names have been forgotten	
4) <u>Supply troops</u> Remaining hospitals and other sanitary establishments not yet evacuated or in the course of being evacuated	-----	
<u>C. Parallel authorities and units</u>		
1) 6th Armored Division (Army)	Commander: Maj. Gen. Baron von Waldenfels	6-14 April evening
2) Fuehrer Grenadier Division (Army)	Commander: Maj. Gen. Meder	4-14 April evening advanced elements from 6 April

List of units (Cont'd)

Designation	Name of commanders	Time
3) 2d SS Panzer Division, "Das Reich"	Commander: SS Standartenfuehrer Lehmann, from 14 April SS Standartenfuehrer Kreutz	(4-14 April evening;) (remaining elements subordinated on 13 April)
4) 3d SS Panzer Division, "Totenkopf"	Commander: SS Oberfuehrer Becker	4-14 April evening

APPENDIX B

Evaluation of Troops

Order of Battle

Designation	Strength		Combat Efficiency
	Personnel	Materiel	
Alert units of 11th Reconnaissance Replacement and Training Bn	2 cavalry troops, full strength	small arms machine guns	well led, average
Alert units of 4th and 33d Armored Replacement and Training Bn	No record	light infantry weapons no tanks	well led; good combat efficiency employed as infantry
Alert units of 17th Antitank Replacement and Training Bn	1 company	4 mtz 75-mm anti-tank guns 3 75-mm heavy anti-aircraft guns	well led; good combat efficiency
Alert battery of 96th Artillery Replacement and Training Bn	1 battery	4 105-mm AA howitzers	subordinated to 6th Armored Division, details unknown
Alert units of 80th and 86th Engineer Replacement and Training Bn	3 companies	small arms complete	well led, good combat efficiency

Designation	Strength		Combat Efficiency
	Personnel	Materiel	
Alert units of 17th Administrative Replacement and Training Bn	1 company	small arms	inexperienced; poorly led, poor combat efficiency
Alert units consisting of soldiers on leave, convalescents and stragglers from field forces and Navy	No detailed record. At the time, about 8 battalions	mostly small arms	poorly led, and for the most part moderate to poor combat efficiency
Air Force alert units	About 3 battalions	small arms	badly led; poor combat efficiency
AA units of 24th AA Division detailed for ground fighting	2 AA regiments, about 75%	complete	command average; Combat efficiency average, in part good
Police alert units	1 police regiment 3 police battalions	small arms 1 police tank	command poor; inexperienced; poor combat efficiency, no enthusiasm
Units of the local Volkssturm	No record	small arms	uninstructed command; no combat experience, very poor combat efficiency, with some exceptions

Designation	Strength		Combat Efficiency
	Personnel	Materiel	
Hitler Youth Battalion	3 companies some anti-tank detachments	some panzerfausts, some arms	well led; high combat morale; willing and eager to fight; high combat efficiency
Alert units of 17th Signal Replacement and Training Bn	1 understrength company	small arms, just sufficiently equipped with signal equipment	personnel and materiel to keep up and maintain local installations; poor radio equipment (fighting troops were mostly connected by local telephone network); willing to work
Armed Forces patrol service	Not constant	small arms	Not dependable, as command belonged to Austrian resistance movement; improved later
Constabulary	No record	small arms	At first fair, but deteriorated gradually
Supply troops	-----	-----	Except for sanitary establishments, no supply troops were available; thus the bulk of alert units depended on the supply installations of the field divisions and experienced great difficulty

Designation	Strength		Combat Efficiency
	Personnel	Material	
6th Armored Division (Army)	About 25%	adequate	Very well led; excellent combat efficiency
Fuehrer Grenadier Division (Army)	100%	100%	Well led; high combat efficiency
2d SS Panzer Division	About 50%	adequate	Well led; combat efficiency better than average
3d SS Panzer Division	About 25%	adequate	Well led; good combat efficiency

MAPS IN THE ENGLISH AND GERMAN
ORIGINALS AT OCMH